
Berk buys silver tetradrachm of Naxos

The coveted silver tetradrachm of Naxos was acquired recently in a private sale by Harlan Berk, Joliet, Ill.



The silver tetradrachm of Naxos, for which Berk paid \$175,000.

The specimen cost \$175,000, acquired from the Beverly Hills firm of Bowers and Ruddy at the recent Chicago International Coin Fair.

Berk said, "I purchased the coin for my own collection. I've wanted it for a long time, and feel the price asked was not too much."

The coin, one of 62 known specimens, depicts a bearded head of Dionysus facing right, crowned with an ivy wreath. On the reverse a bearded ithyphallic Silenus is shown, with animal ears and tail, squatting, holding a cantharus in his right hand.

It is believed that all 62 known specimens were struck by the same obverse die and the same reverse die. Even so, notable differences can be seen on various specimens, especially edge cracks, a characteristic of coins struck without a collar.

Jeffrey Spier, manager of the Bowers and Ruddy ancient

coin department, described the circumstances of issuance of the coin, which amounts to a commemorative piece.

"Like the inhabitants of Ca-



Harlan J. Berk

tana, the original population of Naxos, which had been removed to Leontini by Hieron, returned to their city in 461 B.C.

"Apparently to commemorate their return, they struck

this extraordinary tetradrachm, a masterpiece that ranks as perhaps the finest of all Greek coins.

"Only one obverse and one reverse die were engraved, and each is of exquisitely fine work. The obverse portrays a finely detailed head of Dionysus, and the reverse masterfully depicts a drunken Silenos in full frontal view with skillful foreshortening.

"It is undoubtedly the work of a master artist commissioned for a special purpose," Spier concluded.

Charles Seltman, in *Master Pieces of Greek Coinage*, written in 1949, describes the subject of Silenos: "Physically perfect, squatting facing, his right knee up, left thigh level; mane, beard, tail, like other hair by this artist.

"He turns toward a metal cup held in his right hand. Among many ugly and un-Greek heritages from medi-

eval Puritanism is a habit of using 'animal' applied to man as a term of abuse, when the term should, of course, only be an unprejudiced reference to one aspect of humanity which can be just as good (or non-good) as the aspect called 'spiritual.'

superb silenos is called — as called it must be — magnificent in its animal vitality, this is to be understood as most high praise — never a petulant pejorative.

"Magnificence of this kind is here portrayed as on no other monument."

The Seltman book, with many enlarged illustrations, is available in reprint form from *Obol International*, 8 South Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60603.

Berk recently moved his offices and his extensive library to 10 North Fairlane Drive, Suite 203, Joliet, Ill. 60435.





